

Lutheran Woman

October 2010

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**You Come Back Different
The Place of the Elder
Blossoming as the Body of Christ**



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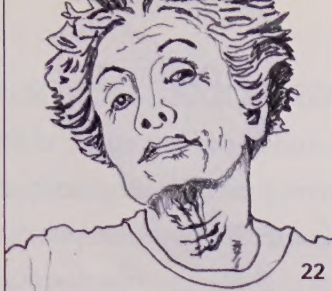


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LIFE IN COMMUNITY

VOLUME 23 NUMBER 8 OCTOBER 2010

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VOICES

Life in Community

by Kate Sprutta Elliott

I like being a part of a

community, except when I don't. I like the feeling of belonging, having people who know me and my stories and who encourage me when I'm going through tough times. I don't like community in conflict or when people challenge me or make too many demands on my time. I suspect you feel the same.

This month the Bible study is focused on 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, which lifts up a metaphor that compares the church to a human body—the body of Christ. The writers tell us that, “Paul points out that just as all body parts are essential for the good working of the body, so are all members essential to the good working of the church.” As the body of Christ, the church lives and works together in community, and community, as we all know, presents challenges and gifts.

One of the gifts of community is that we each can make a contribution to the well-being of the whole using our own unique talents and skills. It's definitely not a “one size fits all” ministry. In “Blossoming as the Body of Christ” author Lily Wu invites readers on “an inspirational tour around the United States.” She writes, “You'll meet lay women from all sorts of backgrounds. Active congregational leaders for most of their lives, these women are the body of Christ acting boldly in their daily work as well.”

There's no age limit on sharing one's gifts in the body of Christ. In “The Place of the Elder,” Martha Sterne writes, “It is hard for a church to live in the tension between compassion and accountability.

... It takes people who are willing to do some eldering—not just for the sake of the body of Christ, but for the sake of all the places we go. We are sent out every week—to what? To ‘go in peace and to love and serve the Lord’....”

The gifts of both elders and children are needed in the body and should be recognized and welcomed. Jennifer Pencek tells the story of a congregation that organizes medical mission trips that include children. In “You Come Back Different,” she writes about one family: “The Newcombs make the trek to Nicaragua each year with their three children in tow: Maryann, 11, William, 8, and Alexandra, 3. From creating craft projects with local children to handing out lollipops and stickers, the Newcomb children have their own important role in bridging the gap between local residents and those on the mission trip.”

But living in community can be challenging—and can include conflicts. In “Bickering in the Body,” Karen Bockelman writes, “The word *conflict* comes from a Latin word *configere* which means ‘to strike together,’ an action that causes sparks. The sparks that come from living together can light a Pentecost fire leading to a time of renewal in purpose and mission or, the sparks can fan the angry flames of meltdown.”

As a community of women who are part of the body of Christ, let us pray that our life together sparks a Pentecost fire that is a light to the world. 🌿

Kate Sprutta Elliott is editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*. You may write to her at LWT@elca.org.



GIVE US THIS DAY

Equipped to Embrace Diversity

by Angie Shannon

Fort Wayne, Indiana, is home to some of the most beautiful churches you will find anywhere. Spires stretch heavenward. Among these marvels are modest churches, warehouses, storefronts, and even homes where people gather each Sunday to call upon the name of the Lord. The body of Christ is vast! There are so many in Ft. Wayne, it's nicknamed "the City of Churches."

Presently, I am on "leave from call," which is to say that I am not actively serving a congregation. With my pastor's blessing, I have decided to go on "church safari" in the "City of Churches" visiting other ELCA congregations and even worshipping at churches of other denominations. So far, my expedition has taken me to the Church of God in Christ, an Episcopal church, a Presbyterian multicultural gathering, and a Benedictine monastery.

I have also worshipped in a Baptist congregation affiliated with the Progressive Black National Convention (PNBC), a historically African American denomination. In addition to Christ, what we sadly hold in common is an apparent lack of diversity. The PNBC is almost entirely African-American and the ELCA is almost entirely Euro-American despite the diversity we see in nearly every arena outside church.

Often in weak resignation, we shrug our shoulders and cite Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s observation that Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America. As the body of Christ, we must move beyond our paralysis; Dr. King certainly

did. He made the Sunday quip after a presentation at Western Michigan University in 1963. What Dr. King actually said was this: "At 11 o'clock on Sunday morning when we stand and sing that Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation. This is tragic. Nobody of honesty can overlook this." He exhorts the church to cast off the "yoke of segregation" and rise to the opportunity to transform society. Forty-six years later, Dr. King's observations are still timely.

Admittedly, these are exciting and scary times, if we are honest with ourselves. Diversity of all sorts seems to be rushing at us at a break-neck pace. The temptation is to hunker down and sing above the din "A Mighty Fortress" or "We Shall Overcome" as we feebly accept one another at the annual Martin Luther King observances.

We are Lutherans, to be sure, and regardless of our differences in worship styles, in race, ethnicity, national origin, sexuality, thought, and opinion—along with other expressions of Christianity—we are the body of Christ. God is not surprised by our differences, although they seem to startle us!

Even today, God calls us—the body of Christ—to embrace diversity, and stand together and sing "In Christ There is No East or West" and to authentically live into this reality. It is attainable because God has entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation. Whatever God calls us to, God equips us to do! 🌿

The Rev. Angie Shannon is a pastor and writer.



YOU COME BACK DIFFERENT

By Jennifer Pencek



FAMILIES LEFT THEIR SMALL, TIN-ROOF HOMES IN NICARAGUA AND STARTED WALKING

own dirt roads where pigs and dogs roamed free. The people were on a mission to get medical help and they were headed to the temporary clinics.

Also on a mission were 15 Pennsylvanians, the majority of whom were members of Grace Lutheran Church in State College, Pa. Each year over spring break, church members and supporters depart the comfort of their homes to travel to Jinotega, Nicaragua, and its nearby villages. The medical mission trip volunteers leave behind hot showers, cell phones, and friends who speak English to help their neighbors in another part of the world.

Many of the people making the trip feel they are answering a call from God.

"It feels very right," says Celeste Newcomb, who leads the mission trip each year with her husband, Brian, an emergency medicine physician. "I feel this is our way to give back to the world and live life as Christians."

Responding to Jesus' love

Grace Lutheran Church has organized a medical mission trip to Nicaragua for the past three years, working closely with the Ministry of Health in Nicaragua to provide help where it is needed. Members offer frontline medical care, including dispensing vitamins, de-worming medication, and limited treatments. The idea for the trip began in the mind of the Rev. P. Stevens Lynn, senior pastor at Grace.

"When I became senior pastor [in 2006], I had a need for Grace to begin to do some mission work," he says. "It could have been anywhere. But St. Paul United Methodist Church was doing a trip to Nicaragua. When I heard about that, I piggybacked on what St. Paul was doing. Brian and Celeste Newcomb had gone with them, so they knew about the logistics."

Mission work, Lynn says, is a direct response to the gospel. "One way we respond to Jesus' love for us is loving and caring for our neigh-

bor," he says. "One way we hadn't done that was direct mission work."

Typically, the group is based out of two orphanages, one in Jinotega and the other in Los Cedros, outside Managua. The team sets up temporary medical clinics within a few hours of their base. The local people stand in long lines for hours waiting to be seen—some are sick, others hold their children, yet no one complains.

That is not to say, however, that the mission trip members are accepted right away. They are still strangers to those who call the area home. But the members have special tools to win over the people—strong faith and children.

Children open doors

The Newcombs make the trek to Nicaragua each year with their three children in tow: Maryann, 11, William, 8, and Alexandra, 3. From creating craft projects with local children to handing out lollipops and stickers, the Newcomb children have their own important roles in bridging the gap between local residents and those on the mission trip.

"In that culture, children are loved," Celeste Newcomb says. "When our team shows up with children, they open doors for us. But they sometimes have fear of outsiders." To some, bringing young children on such a long journey and

having them experience a week of bumpy bus rides to rural villages, long days helping people, and seeing poverty up close would be too much to handle. But the Newcombs feel just the opposite. They see their children as being just as able as adults to spread the word of God in their own way.

"It's very important our children are involved in the mission work," Celeste says. "It's a unique way to involve them. I'm lucky to have kids who have a strong work ethic and want to help, and they've had a chance to develop relationships with the kids in the orphanages."

Out of the comfort zone

While the Newcombs felt the call from God to make the trip to Nicaragua, Judith Pleskonko tried to run the other way.

"Dr. Newcomb asked me to go on the trip one day at work and I honestly looked around me to see if he was talking to someone else," the 56-year-old emergency room nurse says. "At first I said no because I would be too far out of my comfort zone. But the more I thought about

it, the more I wanted to do something for people who would really appreciate it."

Those who received help were not just the clinics' patients. Mission trip members say they received just as much, including Pleskonko. She admits she was going through some personal issues before the trip and her faith "wasn't as good as it should have been." Months after the trip she raves about her time there, meeting the families, and finding a relationship previously lacking—with God.

Helping her along the way were daily group devotions, as well as the strong faith of those she met on the trip. On one Sunday, mission members were invited to a small Lutheran church attached to a village's house. The church had no roof, just four walls. What it lacked in physical structure, it made up for in its impact on worshippers.

During the mission trip, 28 prayer shawls made by members of the Knit Wits (a women's group at Grace Lutheran) were distributed to Nicaraguan women, along with prayers. Each day, someone on the

trip would post a message on a blog on the Grace Lutheran Web site detailing the day's events.

The shot of faith given every day changed Pleskonko. "I have renewed faith now," she says. "It was like a family there, and we worked so well together."

The same woman who could not imagine herself leaving her comfort zone wants to return next year and says the mission trip is one of her favorite topics. "If I can grow when I'm overweight, 56, and set in my ways, really anyone can do it," she says laughing.

Especially grateful

Katie Kreisher agrees. The 19-year-old says there is no job too small or too big to prevent someone from getting involved with mission trips.

"I've always wanted to do some kind of trip [like this]," she says. "Even if you feel out of your comfort zone, go for it. You get so much out of it."

Kreisher, a graphic design major at Penn State University, felt that extra nudge to go on the mission trip when she saw a notice for a photographer to document the trip. Since photography is one of her hobbies, Kreisher volunteered. Along with taking pictures, Kreisher played with Nicaraguan children and helped wherever she was needed.

Now months after the trip she says she carries lessons she learned

Would your congregation or group consider organizing a mission trip?

On the ELCA Global Mission Web site, you can find a *Companion Synod Handbook* for free download. It will help you strengthen or start a global relationship, and prepare for cross-cultural, faith-based international travel. Go to www.elca.org/globalmission and click on "engage in global mission" and then click on the link for "resources."

amely patience and not taking anything for granted.

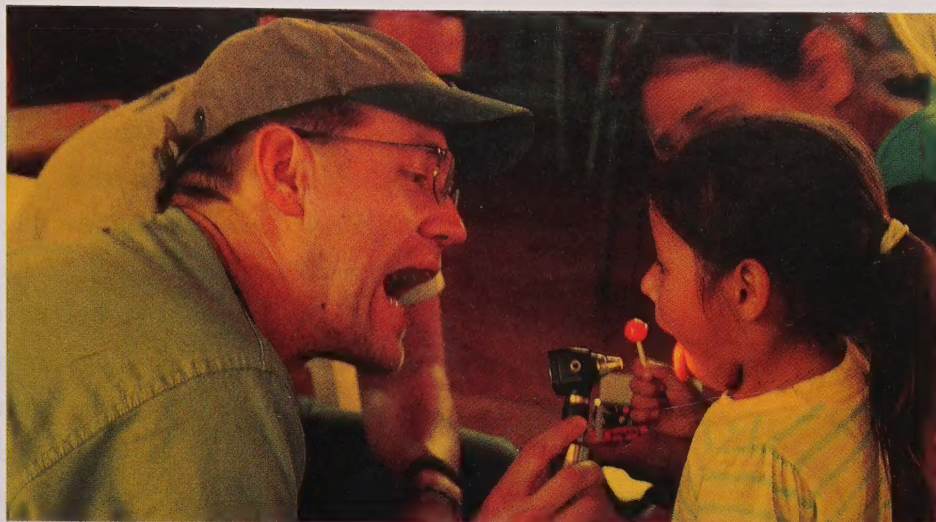
"All the people there were way more patient than anyone here could be, and they were in worse conditions," she says. "I definitely feel more grateful for what I have. I'm especially grateful for my family. I'd say my faith got stronger. I feel we all made each other stronger on the trip."

The body of Christ in the world

The work done by those on the trip is not over. While there will be another trip next spring, those in State College and the Grace Lutheran family are still reaping the benefits through shared faith and knowledge.

"The mission trip really is beneficial to Grace in two ways: Members are able to help through finance and prayer, and everyone who goes, it's a little different for them when they come back," Pastor Lynn says. "Your attitude about life is different. The more people that go, the better for the people and for Grace Lutheran Church. What they learn and experience permeates and spills out to other members of the congregation." 🌿

Jennifer Pencek is a member of Grace Lutheran Church and a freelance writer based in State College, Pa. She is also associate editor of the Center for the Performing Arts at Penn State University.



12 INSIGHTS FROM MISSION TRIPS

1. It is not the church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission who has a church in the world.
2. That which is yet to be done in the world is far less than that which has already been done.
3. People are more alike than their cultures.
4. Love is the universal language.
5. Short-term mission is a treasure hunt.
6. In cross-cultural encounters, we are meeting long-lost, distant relatives.
7. God goes before you. You are catching up on a conversation that God has already begun.
8. God does not send us to be critics.
9. In the treasure hunt of grace, our encouragement and affirmation of people may be our most significant ministry.
10. Our privilege is to lift Jesus up in deed and word.
11. The quality of our love as a team and our incorporation of new team members may be our greatest witness.
12. God will not call us to do something without also giving us the resources to do it.

Source: Grace Lutheran Church Nicaragua medical mission trip handbook



HEALTH WISE

Susan Revier realized

she was shrinking.

Though she ate three nutritious meals per day and should have maintained a healthy weight, Revier lost 30 pounds over the course of five years, eventually whittling down to just 95 pounds on her 5'5" frame.

"I didn't know what was wrong with me, except that I always felt fatigued and often had stomach cramps and bloating," says Revier, 67, a retired elementary school teacher in San Antonio, Texas. "Doctors theorized that I had a digestive disorder, but it wasn't until a gastroenterologist finally tested me for celiac disease that I discovered I had this condition, an autoimmune disorder that makes you allergic to gluten, interferes with digestion, and prevents you from absorbing the nutrients you need."

Revier eliminated gluten, a protein found in wheat, from her diet. Within six months, her normal, 125-pound weight returned. Her red blood-cell count spiked, ridding her of the anemia that had once left her exhausted. Her calcium and vitamin D intake improved, boosting her previously low bone density. Buying gluten-free cookbooks and testing new recipes, she not only adapted to her new way of eating, but learned to enjoy it.

Of the 3 million Americans who have celiac disease, an estimated 80 percent don't realize it, putting them at high risk for anemia, osteoporosis, infertility, thyroid disorders, and other problems associated with their disease. Especially

endangered are older people, whose immunity can be compromised, and children, whose growth can be stunted.

Why does celiac disease take an average four years to diagnose? "Only two hallmark symptoms—which aren't always present—set it apart from other digestive disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome and Crohn's disease," says Marlene Schluckebier, executive director of the Celiac Sprue Association. "The first is a blistering rash, and the second is gluten ataxia, a neurological problem that affects motor skills."

Because 1 percent of people have celiac disease, because half of patients don't have obvious symptoms, and because doctors don't always recognize the signs that do appear, it's vital that you and your loved ones know about this condition's cause and its symptoms—especially during the cool-weather months, when many of us reach for carbs as comfort food.

Celiac disease (also called sprue or gluten-sensitive enteropathy) is strongly tied to genetics, so if someone in your immediate family has it, there's a 5 percent to 15 percent chance that you will, too. In many cases, the disease is tied to prior health trauma such as autoimmune problems, diabetes, or cancer, which Revier had in her colon before she developed gluten intolerance.

In people with celiac disease, eating gluten causes the immune system to attack the small intestine, which prevents food from being properly absorbed. The body releases toxic chemicals that assault

When You Can't Eat Wheat

by Molly M. Ginty

This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org for more information.

the villi, tiny, hair-like projections that line the small intestine. After the villi break down, they can no longer do their job of absorbing fat, protein, vitamins, and minerals. Instead of nourishing the body, these nutrients are excreted.

Many celiac patients manage to regrow their villi and return to good health by making the same changes that Revier did: cooking gluten-free meals at home or choosing restaurants (such as Olive Garden, Outback Steakhouse, and Ruby Tuesday) that have gluten-free menu options. "Whenever I go out to eat, I have to check in with the waiter and be very careful," says Revier. "My gluten intolerance is so strong that I'll get sick eating a hamburger that's been cooked on the same grill as a whole-wheat bun."

Since there is no cure for celiac disease, the only effective treatment is avoiding all grains that contain gluten: barley, bulgur, durum, farina, graham flour, kamut, kasha, matzo meal, rye, semolina, spelt, and triticale. Celiac patients must also steer clear of products that use gluten as an additive or binding agent: modified food starch, malt flavoring, postage stamps, commercial cosmetics, and some toothpastes, vitamins, and prescription medications. "Gluten is in everything from ice cream to beer, so patients need to educate themselves and opt for the most risk-free choices," says Schluckebier.

People with celiac disease can enjoy gluten-free grains such as amaranth, buckwheat, oats, and quinoa—as long

as they make sure these have been prepared at gluten-free facilities.

More than 2,000 wheat-free products are available today, and according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the gluten-free food industry is growing at 15 percent per year.



"Restaurants are getting better at helping people with celiac disease, and research is ramping up, too," says Schluckebier. "Here in the United States, the National Institutes of Health is doing a longitudinal study that will follow children with celiac disease and track their symptoms for decades. In Australia, scientists are working on a vaccine. And across the globe, researchers are developing gene therapies that also look very promising." 🌿

Molly Ginty lives in New York. Her work has appeared in *Women's eNews*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, and *Ms*.

For more information:

Celiac Disease Foundation
www.celiac.org

Celiac Sprue Association
www.csaceliacs.org

National Institutes of Health
Celiac Disease Awareness Campaign
www.celiac.nih.gov



A Safe, Welcoming Community

It's been almost 10 years since Ginny used methamphetamine (meth), a highly addictive drug that landed her in jail because she also sold it. But that wasn't her only problem. In her lifetime, she'd been beaten, raped, stabbed, and molested. Then she discovered her fiancée abused children, so she left him and sought out a homeless shelter in the city in which she lives, Spokane, Wash.

While there, she learned about Women's Hearth from two prostitutes also living in the homeless shelter, and she decided to check it out.

Women's Hearth is safe, welcoming community that promotes growth and well being in body, mind, and spirit for women of diverse backgrounds. The center fosters nurturing relationships and advocates for change in systems that oppress women.

The program received a grant from Women of the ELCA in 2009 and 2010.

"I've never felt like I belonged anywhere until I walked in there," Ginny said. She began attending one of the many classes Women's Hearth

offered, including one on writing. Some of her poems have been included in books of poetry published through Women's Hearth.

"It's very empowering to have your voice heard, especially if that's never happened before," she said. Ginny and about 100 to 150 other women are helped each day in Spokane by Women's Hearth, its program director Mary Rathert said.

Women's Hearth offers about 100 groups and classes per month, including 12-step meetings, support groups, life skills classes, crafts, music, spirituality, and journaling.

"In the fall, we began a series of (much requested) sewing classes," Rathert said. Women's Hearth also helps women get into drug treatment, find housing, get a job, pay off debts, develop parenting skills, and access mental health services.

"We have continued to have nutrition classes and promote more healthy eating," Rathert added. "And we have classes on computer skills, money management, and writing a resume."

Transitional Programs for Women (Transitions), which over-

sees the Women's Hearth program, also offers a food-service job training program that runs New Leaf Bakery-Café. Women of the ELCA is working with the bakery to cater the opening reception at the Triennial Gathering, July 14, in Spokane.

Helping women and children

Inez Torres Davis, Women of the ELCA's director for justice, oversees the grant process. She said the grants committee evaluates each program to which it awards funds, and all have as a main purpose helping women and children.

It is the support of programs like these that is at the core of the purpose of Women of the ELCA, making a positive difference in the lives of women and children, she said. You too can make a difference by sending a gift to the grants program of Women of the ELCA.

In 2010, \$58,000 went to 33 projects—25 domestic and eight international—that range from offering furniture and household goods to families about to move into new homes to programs preventing violence against women.



Women's Hearth client Doris proudly displays her quilt.

2010 DOMESTIC GRANT RECIPIENTS BY SYNODICAL REGION

Transitions (1D) \$2,000

Women's Hearth Support Program Spokane, WA

Provides services to homeless and low income women

Americans Overseas Domestic Violence Crisis Center (1E) \$2,600

Volunteer Advocacy Training, Portland, OR
Provides volunteer training for crisis support to victims of domestic violence

Butte Emergency Food Bank (1F) \$2,000 Butte, MT

Purchases six-month supply of diapers for distribution to the needy

Many Mansions (2B) \$2,000

Stoll House Project, Thousand Oaks, CA
Provides transitional housing and supportive services for homeless women who are single-parents often fleeing from domestic abuse

Civitan Foundation, Inc. (2D) \$2,000

Living Better Together, Phoenix, AZ

Offers women and girls with developmental disabilities weekly activities that promote healthy lifestyles

Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest (2D) \$2,000

Women's Empowerment Program, Phoenix, AZ

Provides enhanced resettlement services to refugee women

Clinica Tepeyac (2E) \$2,800

"Es Difícil Ser Mujer?" Women's Health Program Denver, CO

Provides Spanish-speaking women the tools to identify depression and make positive changes in their lives

Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches

(3G) \$1,000

Community Justice Project, Minneapolis, MN

Recruits, trains, matches, and provides support for women who work with women wanting to escape prostitution, chemical dependency, and domestic/sexual abuse

Northfield Retirement Community Foundation

(3I) \$2,000

Re-connecting Lutheran Caregivers,

Congregations & Community, Northfield, MN

Offers daughters serving as caregivers to their mothers emotional and informational support

Interfaith Health Services (4A) \$2,000

Latinas in Action, Omaha, NE

Offers micro-business support to participants

Family Promise of Bell County (dba EBIHN) (4D) \$2,400

Interfaith Hospitality Network, Temple, TX

Provides furniture and household items to homeless families moving into their own homes

Korean American Women In Need (KAN-WIN) (5A) \$1,600

Bilingual Domestic Violence Service

Aurora, IL

Facilitates mental and emotional recovery for adult and children victims of domestic violence and/or sexual assault

Mutual Ground, Inc. (5A) \$2,000

Domestic Violence Women's Advocacy Program (Bicultural), Chicago, IL

Advocates for, supports, and empowers Hispanic/Latina domestic violence victims

Churches United of the Quad Cities (5B) \$1,000

Winnie's Place, Rock Island, IL

A free emergency shelter for women victimized by homelessness or domestic violence

All Peoples Church (5J) \$2,000

Urban Roots - Spa for the Soul, Milwaukee, WI

Offers events and mini-retreats that feed mind, body, and spirit for women and teen girls

Lutheran Deaconess Association, Inc.

(6C) \$1,000

Diakonia for Spiritual Lives, Valparaiso, IN

Offers urban women a way to claim their gifts while nurturing their spiritual lives with the practice of diakonia

Salem Lutheran Church (6D) \$1,500

Children N Faith, Toledo, OH

Offering children in specific neighborhoods tools and resources to develop a relationship with God

Trinity Lakewood Community Outreach

(6E) \$1,900

Well Women, Lakewood, OH

Offers at-risk women nutritious meals, health screenings, health education, and social support

Rapha Women's Ministry (7B) \$1,800

Wellness Today Workshop-Stress

management, New Haven, CT

Offers group support for women who are drained physically, emotionally, and spiritually

The Brooklyn Childcare Collective (7C) \$2,600

Power Sisters Academy, Brooklyn, NY

Fills the services gap for socially and economically disadvantaged young mothers

Clinton County Women's Center (8E) \$2,100

Resilient Lives, Lock Haven, PA

Offers awareness, sensitivity, and knowledge to medical personnel who treat victims of domestic and/or sexual violence

Womens' Alliance for Theology, Ethics

and Ritual (8F) \$2,300

Women Changing Religions, Silver Spring, MD

Mentor interns and visiting scholars/ministers

Unbridled Change (9A) \$2,600

Take Back the Reins, Boons Mill, VA

Offers counseling to women and teens who are survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault

West Virginia Community Services for Women

(9A) \$1,500

Suit for Success and Mentoring Project

Bluefield, WV

Provides programs that empower disadvantaged women to improve their place in the world

PACE Center for Girls, Inc. of Pasco County

(9E) \$2,500

Spirited Girls! New Port Richey, FL

Offers academic and recreational activities to prevent or decrease high-risk behaviors in at-risk teen girls

2010 INTERNATIONAL GRANT RECIPIENTS

BY COUNTRY

BANGLADESH

Surjamukhi Shisu Sangha

Prevent Domestic Violence, \$1,000

Works to prevent violence against women and children and establish women in income-generating positions

CAMAROON

Bongeh Women Common Initiative Group

Revitalization of Single Parents Participation

In Social Life, \$1,000

Helps women who are single parents, widowed because of HIV/AIDS, establish economic self-reliance

ISRAEL

Meir Panim - Mifal Chaim

Back to Work, \$1,000

Offers workshops for "chronically unemployed women," which includes battered women

KENYA

Generation Women Group

Support of Teenage Female Orphans, \$1,000

Provides holistic support to orphans in Obunga Estate, Kisumu, who are victims of human rights' abuse

Kenya Pastoralist Journalist Network

Alternative Livelihood, \$1,000

Offers job training and empowerment for women who have worked in the field of female circumcision, helping them discover alternate ways of bringing in income

SOUTH AFRICA

PATCH/Helderberg Child Abuse Centre

Please Report Rape, \$1,000

Offers assessment and therapy for children that were sexually abused

TANZANIA

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania—

North Central Diocese

Arusha Lutheran Medical Centre Rape Care

Centre, \$1,000

Provides rape and sexual abuse counseling

UGANDA

AHEAD Energy and Kagando Rural Development

Center

Eliminating the Killer in the Kitchen, \$1,000

Installs and introduces efficient, clean-burning cook stoves at Kagando Hospital, Kasese, Uganda, where families are required to cook for patients

The next round of grant proposals will be accepted between December 15, 2010, and February 15, 2011.

Go to www.womenoftheelca.org to learn more about Women of the ELCA grants.



LET US PRAY

Learning to Be We

by Julie K. Ageson

*As the grains of wheat once scattered on the hill were gathered into one to become our bread; so may all your people from all the ends of earth be gathered into one in you.**

Fields of sun-ripened

wheat, the grains ground to the powdery softness of sifted flour, yeast that comes alive in kneaded dough, a crusty loaf of freshly baked bread . . . and this melding of ordinary things is an example—a picture of the people of God scattered across every time and every place, gathered into one to become bread. Bread for the world, the bread of life, the body of Christ called to feed the world—such remarkable images!

But too often, this body of Christ looks more like a mix of oil and water. Forget the yeast, forget the mixing together. We cling to our individuality, to our corner on the truth. Do you get cynical or skeptical about what it means to be the body of Christ? Do we really care about unity, the common good, neighborliness, being the body of Christ?

We're proud of making our own way. We're fiercely protective of our individual rights. We're adamant about each person's claim to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We like our independence even if it comes at the expense of our neighbor or the person we sit next to at church or people halfway around the world or a planet in jeopardy.

While we may be connected to larger communities such as our congregation, neighborhood groups, even our friends

on Facebook, it's easy for us to focus on *me* rather than *we*.

Perhaps there is no more important challenge to 21st-century Christians than learning to think communally, than learning to live together as the body of Christ. In a time of comfort and abundance, of self-expression and self-absorption, how do we live a connected and communally responsible life of faith that moves beyond the *me* to the *we*?

To think communally means understanding ourselves as the body of Christ in all its diversity. It means putting aside our differences and caring about the common good. It means thinking of ourselves as the face of Christ, reflecting a God who loves the world and calls us to care for it and for one another in every way imaginable.

Learning to be *we* is what it means to be the body of Christ. In the words of liturgical scholar Gail Ramshaw, "Prayer is not about the *me* who is, but about the *us* whom faith hopes we become." In our praying, in our life together, in our struggle to be Christ's body in the world, let us learn to be *we*. 🌿

Julie K. Ageson is coordinator of ELCA Resource Centers and director of the Resource Center for the Eastern North Dakota Synod. She is a member of Bethesda Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minn.

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One bread, one body, one Lord of all . . .

One cup of blessing which we bless . . .

And we, though many, throughout the earth . . .

*We are one body in this one Lord.***

THE PLACE OF THE ELDER

by Martha Sterne



I have been thinking a lot lately about the art of eldering. Partly because I am finally glad when the cashier just looks at me and asks if I want the over 55 discount. Believe it or not, I used to not like that. It is funny what a

recession and a few more years can do to clear the mind. And surely the first step toward elder wisdom is to receive the gifts that age can bestow, like the discount at the grocery store, with gratitude.

I have also been thinking about eldering because of two women in our parish—older elders up in their 90s—who I learned had led fruitful and exotic and deeply faithful lives as I prepared for their funeral homilies. Which seems sort of late.

After their funerals I had repeated conversations with people at church who had been acquaintances of these women for decades, and they would say to me, “I didn’t know that she did this.” “I had no idea she loved that.” “I wish I had known her better.”

And that seemed a loss to me, this unknowing of these elders. When we stop being chairs of the committees or teaching in the Sunday school, do we not count anymore? Do we only matter as long as we keep our shoulders to the grindstone? I have had older elders tell me that they do not come to church because they just can’t help out anymore. Yikes.

SEASONS OF ELDERING

A priest friend told me that his very aged father would say to him, “Bryant is useless. Bryant is useless.” And my friend whose brother and father are both named Bryant, at first

thought that his father was making a life judgment on the brother, his namesake. Then it dawned on my friend—the father was making a life judgment on the father, on himself. This old man who had worked hard all his life and been a faithful husband and friend and raised two fine sons saw himself as useless because he could not *do* anymore and nobody ever helped him see it is holy just to *be*.

For 21 years, I have been a “presbyter,” which means “priest” in Greek. Someone recently reminded me that the other meaning for “presbyter” is “elder.” How have we allowed the beauty and power of that word to slip away? How has elder come to mean weak and unattractive? Whatever happened to elder wisdom? Elder power?

Jesus never got to be an elder chronologically speaking. He never hit a wall in his 40s. He never got the yips in his 50s. He never had to re-envision his life without his workplace in his 60s or struggle to claim his spiritual identity in his 70s. He never had people begin to treat him as if he were a wrinkled child in his 80s. He never lost all his friends in his 90s. He missed all that because he never got to be an elder. Or did he?

Last spring I caught a glimpse of a chapel honoring the graduation seniors at our high school. I thought about how throughout our lives we

get seasons to be the elders—over and over and over again. Our little granddaughter at three is learning how to be a big sister, an elder to her baby brother. She is learning not to hug him too hard, and she is learning—slowly—how to share her toys with him and to pat him at the doctor's office and tell him, "Tommy, it's going to be okay."

So, eldering is not primarily a chronological phenomenon. The gifts for eldering are spiritual and cumulative and not simply chronological. We get in touch with our old soul any time in our lives when we live more fully into our being and more deeply connected to others, which is to say to live into the fullness of Christ—our elder brother.

ELDERS DEFINE A COMMUNITY

In Africa a few months ago, I met an elder who was the most powerful woman in her village and everybody knew her in the way she wanted to be known. Her face was confident and elegant and her rule as the chief's first wife was unassailable. I asked her what was her favorite part of her day and she looked at me as if I were crazy—individual personal pleasure not being part of her lexicon. She is the community midwife and she also performs all the male and female circumcisions in the village.

My companions and I were appalled about what happened to

those young girls. This elder would tell you that the village's girls often beg to be circumcised so that they will not be unclean in the eyes of the community.

That is a vicious circle isn't? And I thought here is an elder whose power is absolute. And here is a community that cannot change even its life-withering ways without losing its essence, for the elders with the old ways rule alone. So the only way to be oneself beyond one's tribal identity is to leave. And many do.

I do not think that tribe will last long now that cell phones whisper into the ears of the young. I do not think that what has been passed down from generation to generation as the only way and truth and life will withstand the onslaught of the information age. There will be deep loss in this, and there will also be freedom and new life.

ELDERS AS PART OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

At church we are also in the people-forming business, though we go about it very differently. I bet my African friend would shake her head and sniff and say our way looks more like cats herding cats, and we do have something to learn from her. For she knows that without eldering, a community gets lost. She knows she bears the responsibility of passing on what has been given to her to the next generation.

She *claims* her eldering. Do we? This is worth pondering.

Think about your community of faith. Do the elders have a proper and powerful role in your congregation, in the body of Christ? They should. Are their voices heard? Their voices should be heard. Are their voices the only voices heard? That is a problem. Will there be a bridge of faith in your congregation from this generation to the next? My kids don't much go to church. Do yours? We have to face into this as the elders of the community.

Not that elders are perfect. I also met an 82-year-old American elder in Africa who I heard was also from Jackson, Miss., so I thought: Oh good, I bet we'll have lots in common. Within an hour of laying eyes on him, Jim had complained and cursed repeatedly about the Tanzanian roads, clearly having read none of the materials that had been sent to all of us. And he whined about his health being jeopardized on this trip (that he had put himself on), and he complained about his hunger, then about the food he was served, constantly me, me, me.

On our first afternoon together, he proceeded to make the most racist remark I have heard in years—in front of 12 total strangers including our African trip leader. My husband, who is usually a "live and let live" kind of guy, was stung into action and took the man aside and

said not loudly—but it carried—that his actions are exactly what give Southerners a bad name and that we are in this together for the next 12 days and that he was to keep his opinions and offensive jokes to himself. Honestly that intervention from a fellow Southern elder (with occasional reinforcement from everybody else) worked with this man who had no manners, no boundaries, and no sense. And in a paradoxical way, the callout also helped the community engage with the man as well. People did not have to ostracize him because we did not allow his complaints and ignorance to hold the rest of us hostage.

ELDERING IS LIFELONG

In my experience it is hard for a church to live in the tension between compassion and accountability with anybody, much less elders. It takes people who are willing to do some eldering—not just for the sake of the body of Christ, but for the sake of all the places we go. We are sent out every week to “go in peace and to love and serve the Lord” where we live and work or don’t work. That’s why we come together as community of faith—to practice—so we can go out into God’s world, skillfully and lovingly.

Jim, the very unskilled elder, told us he goes to church every Sunday—and I have wondered about that. What gospel does he hear?

What does he think practicing the faith is all about? And what do they do with him at his church? He annoyed me a lot, probably because I was embarrassed that he’s such a stereotype of what many people across the nation think of my home state, but he did more than annoy

**ELDERS ARE JUST LIKE
EVERYBODY ELSE
—HUMAN—
FULL OF GIFTS AND
GRACES AND FLAWS
AND FEARS.**

and embarrass me. He did what elders are supposed to do—he made me think! About how do we keep growing up in faith and love, even on our weak sides, our blind sides. This also is truly worth pondering.

All this is to say elders are just like everybody else—human—full of gifts and graces and flaws and fears. And we don’t just get finished becoming who we are on our 55th birthday or 60th or 65th or 70th. We, just like everybody else, grow or wither, use it or lose it, choose life or choose death a hundred times a day.

This eldering business is a lifelong process. Though it is worth noting that the first people who recognized Jesus after his birth were

aged elders—Anna and Simeon—perhaps because they had the history, the depth, the hope, the distance to see.

One Episcopal archbishop called Jesus the beautiful shepherd. I’ve never really thought of Jesus as beautiful. And I have never really thought of being an elder as beautiful. But holiness is beautiful. Wisdom is beautiful. Goodness is irresistibly lovely. And radiant love is the beginning and the end of all our dreams, no matter how tattered and twisted our desires become. And the people around Jesus experienced him as beautiful—not only for the beauty they saw in him—but for the beauty he helped them see in themselves.

And that is how we recognize the Shepherd and pass on the faith to the newborns in the flock—by the beauty and goodness and wisdom that emerge from us when we follow him. For we are, dear ones, the old and young and middle-aged sheep of his pasture. Day after day, year after year, generation unto generation, may we hear his voice. May we trust him and follow him and live for the sake of his name. For his name is Friend, is Hope, is Love. His name is Elder. ☞

The Rev. Martha Sterne is associate rector of Holy Innocents’ Episcopal Church, Atlanta, and author of *Earthly Good: Seeing Heaven on Earth* and *Alive and Loose in the Ordinary: Stories of the Incarnation*.



CALENDAR NOTES

October

compiled by Audrey Novak Riley from sources including the Lutheran Study Bible, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, and Sundays and Seasons, published by Augsburg Fortress, Publishers (www.augsburgfortress.org).

As the long green season after Pentecost continues, the church reads further along in the Gospel of Luke. The evangelist's feast falls during this month, too.

3 19th Sunday after Pentecost

Why is the author of today's first reading called a "minor prophet"? Only because the book named for him is short. The books of the major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel) are much longer. The texts for today are Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4; Psalm 37:1-9; or Lamentations 1:1-6; Psalm 137 or Lamentations 3:19-26; 2 Timothy 1:1-14; Luke 17:5-10.

4 Francis of Assisi

There are dozens of stories about Francis' love for all God's creatures. It is said that birds would gather around him, fish would peek up out of the water to listen to him, and wild rabbits would hop up to sit in his lap. His love for animals is why many churches keep the custom of blessing animals on Francis' day. He died on this date in 1226.

10 20th Sunday after Pentecost

In today's first reading, we hear the story of Naaman, the mighty warrior whose leprosy was healed after the prophet Elisha had him wash in the Jordan River. This vivid story would make a good movie: There's a proud general, a kind-hearted slave girl, a nervous king, and best of all, a mysterious prophet

who doesn't even get up to greet the general at his door! The passages appointed for today are 2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c; Psalm 111; or Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7; Psalm 66:1-12; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19.

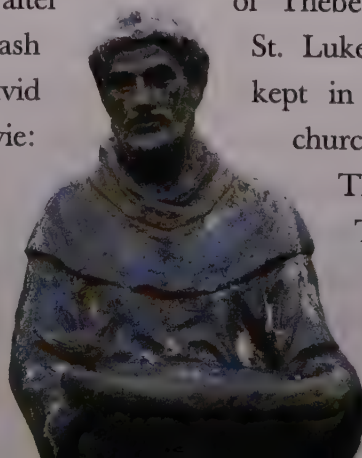
17 21st Sunday after Pentecost

The Genesis reading and the Gospel text harmonize in an interesting way today. Take a look. We have a persistent man wrestling with an angel in the first reading, and a persistent woman wrestling with a judge in the Gospel. Today's readings are Genesis 32:22-31; Psalm 121; or Jeremiah 31:27-34; Psalm 119:97-104; 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5; and Luke 18:1-8.

18 Luke, Evangelist

A very early tradition has it that the evangelist was a native of Antioch in Syria, and died at age 84 in the Greek city of Thebes, where he was entombed. That's what might have been printed in the newspapers around that time (if they had newspapers back then), but that's not the last press clipping for him. He made the headlines just a few years ago. Here's the story.

In 1992, the bishop of Padua in Italy got a letter from the Greek Orthodox metropolitan (a bishop of a province) of Thebes asking for a relic of St. Luke, since his bones were kept in the ancient monastery church of St. Justina in Padua. The bishop was surprised. There was a centuries-old lead casket in St. Justina, and people said it was



Luke's, but wasn't that just a pious legend? They couldn't give away a false relic—they had to find out. The bishop called for a scientific investigation.

The casket held a nearly complete skeleton (the skull was missing), along with some long-dried-out flowers, mouse bones, and a few pottery pieces and coins, one dating back to the year 299. Scientists from the University of Padua took X-rays, DNA samples, and other tests; historians found that a skull said to be Luke's had been taken from Padua to the cathedral of Prague in 1354. In the fall of 1998, a deacon and a scientist from Prague brought that skull to Padua to see if it was a match. It was.

The scientists determined that the skeleton is that of a man about 5'4" tall, probably of Syriac ancestry, who died in his late 70s or early 80s, sometime after the year 70. He had arthritis in his back, emphysema, and bad teeth. The casket matched the tomb in Thebes to the millimeter. The scientists would not declare with 100 percent certainty that the bones were Luke's, but they said (in 750 pages of careful scientific language) they probably are.

But how did the casket and the bones get from Thebes to Padua? In the fourth century, the emperor Constantine took Luke's casket from the tomb in Thebes to the cathedral in his capital Constantinople; in

the eighth century, the custodian of the cathedral took the casket to the monastery in Padua to be safe. In the ninth century, the casket was buried outside the monastery church to hide it from the Goths and Vandals. It was forgotten until the late 12th century, when the monks found it and brought it inside, where it was nearly forgotten again, until the 20th century.

In the fall of 2000, the bishop of Padua flew to Greece. He brought to the metropolitan of Thebes a relic of St. Luke—the rib closest to his heart—to be placed in Luke's original tomb. The Greek church was deeply gratified at this gesture of ecumenical reconciliation, and newspapers all over the world wrote about it.

No matter what we think about relics, the long strange journey of the evangelist's bones add up to a great plot. I can't help but think that Luke—physician, historian, and great storyteller that he was—would have gotten a kick out of the whole thing.

The texts for Luke's day are Isaiah 43:8-13 or Isaiah 35:5-8; Psalm 124; 2 Timothy 4:5-11; Luke 1:1-4, 24:44-53.

24 22nd Sunday after Pentecost

"Thank God I'm not like *those* people!" prays the smug Pharisee. Sometimes Jesus' parables make me wince just a little—the sting of conviction, maybe? How about

you? Today's texts are Jeremiah 14:7-10, 19-22 or Sirach 35:12-17; Psalm 84:1-7; *or* Joel 2:23-32; Psalm 65; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14.

28 Simon and Jude, Apostles

We know almost nothing of these two apostles; the Gospels give us very little information about them. All we know for sure is that they were among Jesus' closest followers, and that's an inspiration to the rest of us. We don't have to be famous to be close to Jesus. The passages appointed for the apostles' day are Jeremiah 26:[1-6] 7-16; Psalm 11; 1 John 4:1-6; and John 14:21-27.

31 Reformation Day

Are you going to sing Martin Luther's great hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" today? The passages appointed for Reformation Day are Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 46; Romans 3:19-28; John 8:31-36.

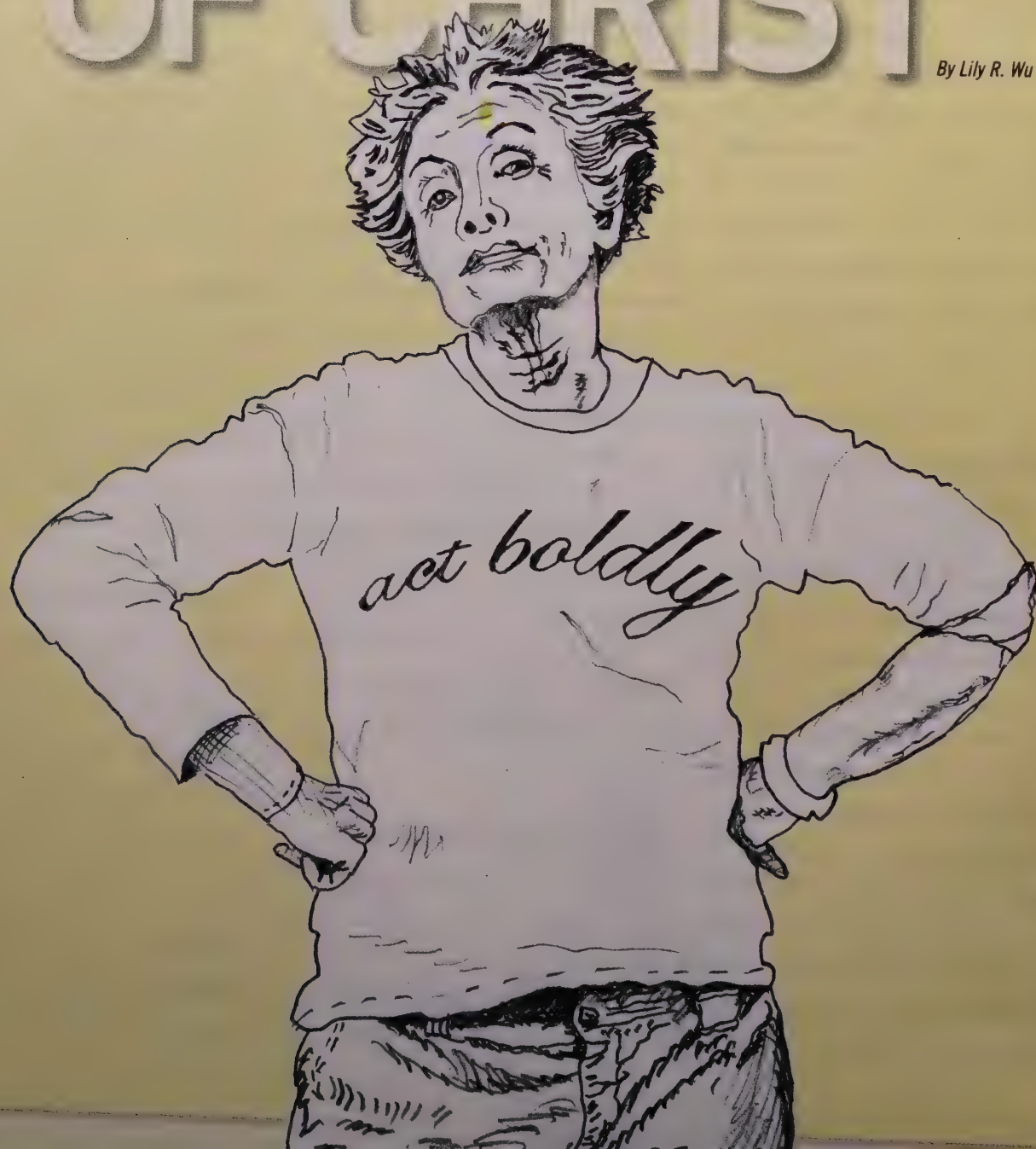
31 23rd Sunday after Pentecost

Most Lutheran congregations will observe Reformation Day today, but you might want to read the texts appointed for the Sunday for your devotions. They are Isaiah 1:10-18; Psalm 32:1-7; *or* Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4; Psalm 119:137-144; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12; Luke 19:1-10. 🌿

Audrey Novak Riley is assistant director for ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Appeal.

BLOSSOMING AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

By Lily R. Wu



If your body could talk, what would it be telling you? I think mine is saying:

"Those fruits and veggies we had last night made me feel good. Thanks!"

"More exercise, please. We're a team, remember? Let's do it!"

"I'm trying my best for you here, but...I really need...some more...sleep."

The older I get, the more I marvel at what my physical body can do, and how long it has sustained me. Our senses are a phenomenal gift. And when my body tells me to hold onto a stairway handrail, take care of a sprained ankle, or have my eyes checked for cataracts, I appreciate more than ever what God gave me, and how it's all connected.

What a splendid reminder we have in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 that we are connected spiritually in Christ. Moreover, each of us has a gifted role in this body. What part of the body are you? Whether we already know our gifts and find fulfillment using them or see what Jesus shows us as we journey on, we are *all* needed for keeping the body healthy. Just as our physical body carries us through life, the Spirit carries God's life into the world through us together.

LET'S CELEBRATE THAT ...

> WE'RE ALL LEARNING. It may take a lifetime to know our body and how it functions best. In my hometown, the weather is changing so quickly that it can feel like spring, summer, or fall in the same day! Whether we are six or 60, it takes some thought to dress appropriately for the weather every morning. Similarly it takes time to prepare for being out in our

fast-changing world, physically and spiritually.

> OUR BODY SPEAKS TO US, IF WE CAN LEARN TO HEAR IT. It takes a while to hear and respond, because body care doesn't happen overnight. I've found that taking notes and revisiting them a few months or years later can help to chart awareness and progress.

> MANY AVENUES ARE OPEN TO REFRESH US. Just as we try new recipes for healthier diets, or new exercises for bodily health, what new "foods and exercises" might we try to strengthen God's body? One is a new online resource on diversity: "One Body, Many Members: A Journey for Christians Across Race, Culture and Class" at www.elca.org/onebody. The authors are African-, Asian- and German-American, and seven contributing writers from varied cultures share stories as well.

> GOD WANTS US TO AFFIRM ALL PARTS OF THE BODY. We are connected to the joys and sorrows of friends and family who are part of us. As our faith matures, we are able to also affirm people who may not be as valued. Who is God leading you to affirm today?

> ENCOURAGEMENT BOOSTS BODY GROWTH. When my pastor first invited me to serve as an assisting

minister, I balked at it. I doubted that I could sing or serve communion well enough. "You could also *speak* the parts," Pastor Joe Mantovani said and smiled. "And we could do a practice run, if you want." He moved along the rail role-playing multiple communicants while I tried my hand with the chalice and the blessings. And so I said yes to serving at the altar for the first time. What is God leading you to explore beyond your comfort zone? How might you encourage someone else beyond theirs?

> INSPIRATION ABOUND. In the church we speak of life in "the body of Christ," while to others "community life" is the most similar idea. In my view, it's ministry in daily life either way, because God brings us into service and teaches us every day of the week, *wherever* we feel drawn or called to be.

DOING MY PART

I have been volunteering at the Asian Language Exchange and Social Network (ALESN) in New York City. ALESN is a grassroots, volunteer-run program where adult English speakers of any background can enjoy free classes in Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese, cultural workshops, and social networking

on weekends and weekday evenings. Most of the instructors and students are 20 to 40 years old. We've served over 120 students so far and over 450 people have signed up for our e-mails.

Co-founders Kam Yau and Tony Parisi set the direction, while Arlene Chin, Diana Mitrano, and I are the advisory board. Arlene, a non-profit administrator, likes to work on infrastructure, analysis, and quality assurance behind the scenes. Diana, a librarian, is the key for curriculum development and contingency planning. I lean toward strategic planning, publicity, and communications. I once headed up an outreach effort, and was totally aware that without their insights and care, I could not have done my part. It is encouraging, affirming, and invigorating to see how the parts fit together, to know that your part is valued, and to accomplish goals with others who want to serve well together (and who look out for one another).

May I invite you now to an inspirational tour around the United States? You'll meet lay women from all sorts of backgrounds. Active congregational leaders for most of their lives, these women are the body of Christ acting boldly in their daily work as well.

FERN LEE HAGEDORN, Beach Lake, Penn., is a volunteer at the small

hydro-powered public radio station WJFF at 90.5 in Jeffersonville, N.Y. Without the volunteers who work with the three-member staff, this rural area wouldn't have public radio at all. "Information is power," Fern says. "It's important to have it without the polarizing political climate fueled by some cable and talk-show hosts."

As an on-air volunteer, Fern is a "one-woman show." Alone in the master control room, she operates all the equipment that enables programming such as NPR's "Morning Edition" (a two-hour news program) to broadcast. On Friday mornings, listeners in their cars or at home hear her announce the weather, community events, and emergency school or road closings. She hopes more people will support their local public radio stations, wherever they are.

MARY NERVIG, McFarlane, Wis., is a psychotherapist working with families who have adopted children from other countries or from the foster care system in this country. The children and their families work through pain to find strength in hope and relationship. "It's truly God's work," she says. "At times it calls for loving the 'unlovable' and holding on to hope even when circumstances feel hopeless. It calls for trust in a faithful process."

Mary thinks she is probably a

foot in God's body, because she's not noticeable, but "keeps moving steadily, not with drama or flair." There's a folk tale of a boy throwing starfish back into the ocean—actions that might be considered fruitless since there are vast numbers of starfish on the beach. Like the boy, Mary says, "Well, it makes a difference to *this one*."

Mary once gave me the book *Kitchen Table Wisdom* by Rachel Naomi Remen, a mind/body health pioneer. It's about people who are healing from life-threatening illnesses, but I recommend it to you as a richly illuminating reflection on spiritual body's health as well.

STACY KITAHATA, Seattle, Wash., is an advocate for comprehensive immigration reform because she takes Leviticus 19:33–34 seriously—to love the stranger as ourselves. She is proud of the ELCA and its longtime ministry with immigrants and refugees. "We are a church with immigrant roots; many of us can recall our own family stories of immigration and hardship," she says. "Meanwhile, it's clear that the current immigration system is broken and needs reform."

Stacy has noticed that most U.S. citizens, including Lutherans, know little about the process for immigrants applying for entry to the United States or adjusting their status. "When they meet immigrants and

hear the stories, their understanding and compassion grow, and they became passionate advocates.”

Her hope is that Lutherans will be at the forefront of immigration reform, and will change the system “to reflect our Christian values and our nation’s identity as a country of immigrants.” She refers us to the Stand for Welcome Campaign at Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services. Go to www.lirs.org (see Get Involved, Advocacy, then the link toward the end of the portrait) to learn more.

ALICE MCCAIN, Siletz, Ore., is a retired elementary teacher who wanted students there to have access to a pumpkin patch to visit at Halloween. She started “Peace Patch Pumpkins” on part of the five-acre farm she and her husband own. It’s the only commercial pumpkin patch in their county, and she uses organic practices to grow pumpkins, decorative gourds, Indian corn, and scarlet runner beans.

She then sells them at the Newport Farmers Market on Saturdays in October, with proceeds going to peace causes such as Lutheran Peace Fellowship (LPF). She smiles remembering when she shared gourds with English as a second language (ESL) classes in Newport in 2009. “The students decorated the gourds to look like people and had a great time!”

Alice has also coordinated peace forums and weekend workshops at her congregation (Atonement Lutheran in Newport), and has taken part in Lutheran advocacy days at Washington and Oregon state legislatures. “My passion is to lift up the cause of a more peaceful and just world for all children,” she says. She directs us to www.lutheranpeace.org.

EVELINE ENG, Huntington Beach, Calif., has been a church music director and piano teacher for most of her life. She volunteers at senior, hospice, and Alzheimer’s and dementia facilities, bringing the joy of singing and listening to music to the residents. They enjoy hearing their favorite songs at the piano or on CDs, and playing percussion instruments along with the music.

Skilled in culinary arts (for example, earning a certificate of achievement in baking/pastry in 2010), she feeds choir members and clergy at special events. “My future plans are to incorporate both music and the culinary arts to inspire others and lead them to a more meaningful experience with God and with life in general,” Eveline says.

SANDRA GARZA, Phoenix, Ariz., is an English language educator for ninth to 12th graders. “They have rich stories to tell that contribute to the fabric of what it means to be Ameri-

can,” she says. But without English skills, “they often have to hide in the shadows of poverty, invisibility, and isolation.”

To boost the building of strong academic skills, Sandra designed a family night to showcase her students’ best work, including oral history interviews with their parents on topics such as environmental sustainability, education, and health. Parents came away proud of their children and with ideas of three to four simple, low-cost things they could do at home to conserve natural resources. “I want them all to feel that we are in this together making this planet a healthy, safe, and loving place that honors and respects cultural differences,” Sandra says.

But anti-immigrant laws in Arizona are “knocking the self-confidence out” of her students. Sandra is teaching them persuasive letter writing “as a way to respond through literate appeals” and trying to set up a dropout prevention program with community involvement. She is living out her faith, empowered by God’s shining heart of welcome.

No matter where we are, may we each find God’s blessing as we live out our parts of Christ’s body in the world. 🌿

Lily R. Wu is a writer, copyeditor, and member of St. Jacobus Lutheran Church in Woodside, Queens, N.Y.

Body of Christ

by Linda Johnson Seyenkulo and Jensen Seyenkulo

WORSHIP RESOURCES

ELW Evangelical Lutheran Worship (*also known as the red book*)

LBW Lutheran Book of Worship (*also known as the green book*)

WOV With One Voice (*also known as the blue book*)

TFF This Far By Faith (*also known as the African American hymnal*)

LLC Libro de Liturgia y Cántico (*also known as the Latino hymnal*)

W&P Worship and Praise (*also known as the contemporary hymnal*)

Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

Amos 3:3

THEME VERSE

That there be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

1 Corinthians 12:25-27

MAIN TEXT

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

OPENING

See the section on Devotional Reading below.

OVERVIEW

We are Christ's body, the church, and we are many members, members with different abilities, viewpoints, and passions. Differences in community are not something new; the church has always experienced differences in community. In our time, those differences can be about things like politics or worship styles or lifestyles. All of those can serve to divide us from each other. In 1 Corinthians, Paul talks of Christ's body the church as one body with many members. This challenging image shows us how we are called to strive for unity while recognizing

the diversity of the members. What does it mean to live together as one body while recognizing the differences among us? How do we listen respectfully to the other and share our views respectfully so that we can live in genuine relationship with each other?

Guidelines and Discussion Method for Our Time Together

To facilitate the discussion, we are going to adapt the rules for engagement and the invitation method of discussion, both of which are printed in their entirety in the September 2010 issue and are available online at www.lutheranwomantoday.org. If possible, keep a copy of them with your study materials so they are always handy during your time together.

At the start of each session, we ask that you refresh your memory of these two sharing strategies. Adhering to them—especially when more sensitive topic areas come into play—helps to assure that productive discussions can respectfully take place, leading to growth and greater appreciation for all who are members of the body of Christ.

DEVOTIONAL READING

We are going to prepare for our time together today by engaging in *Lectio Divina*, an ancient spiritual practice where a Bible passage is read and then there is time for meditation on the word of God. The pur-

pose is to pray the Scripture. We will use the overall theme verse Amos 3:3 and the theme verse for this session of the Bible study (1 Corinthians 12:25-27).

Begin by breathing deeply and getting focused. Breathe deeply and slowly, focusing on each breath.

Listen to someone slowly read Amos 3:3. Then listen to someone read 1 Corinthians 12:25-27. Simply listen to the whole text. The text should be read at a slower pace than usual without emphasis on any particular words.

Reflect during the minute of silence.

Listen to Amos 3:3 and 1 Corinthians 12:25-27 again. Listen for a word or phrase that grabs your attention.

During the next minute of silence, silently pray with that word or phrase.

1. Using the invitation method share (with no explanation or conversation) a word or phrase that grabbed your attention.
2. How might that word or phrase be a prayer, an invitation, a word of encouragement, or a challenge for you today?

As we gather together as the body of Christ in this room, let us sing together.

SONG *(Select one)*

"Gather Us In" ELW 532, WOV 718

"One Bread, One Body" ELW 496, WOV 710, TFF 122

PRAYER

O God, you call us as the body of Christ, as the church, to live together in Christian community. It is such a lovely sounding idea. The reality is that it is wonderful, life giving, and incredibly difficult to do. In fact, it is probably only possible with your help and presence among us. Help us to realize the great gifts that all of your people bring to Christ's body, the church. Move your Holy Spirit, that spirit of peace and

encouragement through our community, the church. Empower our gifts and enliven our gatherings. In Jesus name, Amen.

GATHERING TIME

In this session, we are going to talk about things that unite and divide us as community. We will start with a sharing activity.

3. Can you think of a time when people in your church community suffered with you or rejoiced with you? Using the invitation method of discussion, talk about it briefly.

DIGGING DEEPER

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31

The key question for this study is "what does it mean to be the whole body of Christ?"

The phrase "body of Christ" is used extensively in our main Bible passage for this session, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

We are going to use four methods of reading the Bible from *Opening the Book of Faith* (see chapter 3 of that book, pages 46-65 for further information) to get at the question, what does it mean to be the whole body of Christ. The four methods are: devotional reading (which we just did); the historical reading which looks at what was going on at that time and place when the text was written; the literary reading which looks at the type of literature the text is, who are the main characters, what are the main issues; and the Lutheran theological reading that looks at how it fits into the lives of all of God's people.

HISTORICAL READING

Let's look at what was going on with the church in Corinth at that time in history.

The church in Corinth was one of the first churches started by the Apostle Paul. The report of the start

of the church is in the book of Acts 18:1-18. Paul goes to Corinth where he meets Jews who have come to Corinth after having been ordered by the emperor Claudius to leave Rome. Acts 18:4 says, "Every Sabbath, he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks." He was not well received by the Jews (Acts 18:5-6) so he left them, saying, "From now on I will go to the Gentiles" and go he does and the church of Corinth—the people to whom the Corinthian letters are written—is born.

The members of the church at Corinth were primarily Gentile (non-Jewish) folks who lived in a big city, with plenty of opportunities for lots of things. They were new Christians. It appears they were enthusiastic, and that led to troubles particularly during worship. They had varieties of spiritual gifts, and there were some problems in the community as to which spiritual gift (and therefore which people) were the most important in the church. There were issues around the sacraments, particularly Holy Communion. There were factions, or people following certain leaders or certain ways of doing things in the church (1 Corinthians 1:1-9).

Paul writes to the people of God at Corinth, and teaches them about the variety and versatility of the people who make up the body of Christ.

4. How have you seen the gifts that God has given us cause dissension in the body of Christ, the church? How have you seen that specifically in your church?
5. Have there been issues around sacramental practices in your church? Some examples might include what is considered the appropriate age to begin taking communion, communion of non-members of the congregation, baptism of non-member babies, wine versus grape juice use for communion, or whole participation of congregation members who are differently abled. (Read "Bickering in the Body," p. 32.)

LITERARY READING

Our text comes from part of a letter written by Paul to the people of the church in Corinth. It is Paul's way of staying connected with the people of Corinth as he moves on to other mission fields. It is also his way of addressing issues that have come up in the church that are getting in the way of their ministry and the mission.

The passage of 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 is based on a metaphor. The metaphor is comparing the church, in this case the church in Corinth, with a human body. The passage carries the metaphor farther from just the church being the body of Christ to the members of the church being body parts.

In Corinth, there were jealousies and competitions between church members. Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 that just as all body parts are essential for the good working of the body, so are all members essential to the good working of the church. The metaphor of the body shows the clear connection between the different roles we all play in the body of Christ, the church, and how the various parts of the body work together to make the body function effectively. (Read "Blossoming as the Body of Christ," p. 22.)

In Paul's understanding of the body of Christ, he draws on Greek thought that would characterize a group of people (the believers) becoming one body. Paul carries it further than that because Christians are not simply united by their common belief (faith) but they are baptized into one body, which is the body of Christ. This theology of baptism meant that the believers called themselves "those in Christ" because what makes them different from others is Christ, who they have "put on" in baptism like a garment and in whom they are now living. So Paul, in speaking of the body of Christ, speaks of the collective communion with God rather than the individual believer. Paul, while speaking collectively about the body of Christ, holds out the importance of the gifts of individuals (that is, individually we are part of the whole).

metaphor

a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them (as in *drowning in money*)

Activity

Each faith community has people with varying types of gifts and skills. Often it is difficult to see what our own gifts and skills are. It may be easier to see the gifts of others. In this activity, we will look at how your gifts and the gifts of those in your group make the body of Christ stronger and more life-giving.

First, re-read verses 1 Corinthians 12:27–31 which lay out the gifts of ministry that come from God to God's people. You might also read the section about the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22–23 to broaden the possibilities and understandings of the talents and gifts that come from God. Note that Galatians is another letter written by Paul to the churches that were in conflict over the gifts given by the Holy Spirit.

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

You can see there are a variety of gifts present in your Bible study group. Sometimes when people have different gifts and abilities, tensions can develop or certain gifts can be overlooked. Remember that Paul's understanding of the body of Christ was that we are all tied together by nature of our faith and baptism. That means our church life is different than just a group of folks hanging out together because they like each other. We are bound together by the bonds of faith and love.

6. How does Paul's understanding of the body of Christ being a group of people who are baptized into Christ make the church community different than other groups you may belong to?

Keeping in mind that understanding, consider the following questions.

7. Are there people whose gifts are overlooked in your community of faith? What keeps their gifts from being recognized?
8. How does the community of faith live into Paul's description of the body of Christ in including everyone equally?

LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL READING

Sometimes other sources can shed light on our Lutheran understanding of the Bible. Let's listen to what others say about the body of Christ, including a historical theologian, a person who works with differently abled people, and a modern day theologian who quotes for us from a book of fiction.

As you read these perspectives, keep these questions in mind for discussion:

9. What new thing did you get from their discussion/perspective of community?
10. What is one change you would make in how you approach community in general and specifically with those you differ from within your church community?

HISTORICAL THEOLOGIAN

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran theologian from Germany who was martyred during the Nazi regime of Hitler, wrote about Christian community in this way: "Every human wish dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if genuine community is to survive. He who loves his dream of community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may

be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.” (*Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, HarperCollins, 1954, p. 26)

PERSON WHO WORKS WITH THE DIFFERENTLY ABLED

Jennie Weiss Block, author of *Copious Hosting*, in writing about faith communities and those who are differently abled, says, “Inclusivity, interdependence, and cooperation happen best among people who recognize that human vulnerability is the source of communion in the Kingdom that God desires for us. One of the reasons that it is so important for us to challenge stereotypes of people with disabilities is because these stereotypes make real friendship impossible. As long as we continue to view a person with the disability as “the other,” the person we need to “help,” or cast in the role of “the least” we close off the possibility of friendship and block the way to interdependence.” (*Copious Hosting* by Jennie Weiss Block, Continuum International Publishing, 2002, p. 159)

MODERN-DAY THEOLOGIAN

In “The Nature of Christian Community” (*Setting the Table: Women in Theological Conversation*), Kristine Culp compares Paul’s writing on the body of Christ with a description of a church called together by Baby Suggs, a preacher in Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved*. The story takes place prior to the Civil War in southern Ohio which was across the river from the slave-holding southern part of the United States. In the warmer times of the year, Baby Suggs preached in the woods to folks who came out from hiding. Here is what Toni Morrison writes about Baby Suggs’ ministry:

She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more. She did not tell them they were the blessed of the earth, its inherit-

ing meek or its glory-bound pure. She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it. “Here,” she said, “in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it . . . you got to love it, you! This is flesh I’m talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms I’m telling you . . . love your heart. For this is the prize.” Saying no more, she stood up then and dances with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music. Long notes held until the four-part harmony was perfect enough for their deeply loved flesh.

Culp says that Baby Suggs helps her congregation to imagine grace and healing for their injured selves, and through that, the grace of a laughing, weeping, dancing, whole, and beloved body. She compares it to our passage from Paul on the parts of the body. (*Setting the Table: Women in Theological Conversation* edited by Rita Nakashima Brock, et al, 1995, pp. 156–157)

DIGGING DEEPER

Lutherans understand that the word of God, the Bible, speaks to us in a public way, so that what we hear and learn from the Bible is available to everyone. And what others hear and learn can speak to us.

In some cultures, the concept of functioning collectively to greater good is basic to the community. Some cultures seek to uphold individuality in all circumstances. Many of us live in communities and worship in churches that are made up of people from

similar backgrounds and cultures. That is changing many of our communities. It is important to think about how our reading and studying of the Bible can be deepened and broadened with the help of others who come from a different context.

What follows are several options that you may wish to pursue. Feel free to develop your own based on the way you have been inspired by the session today.

Activity Options

Develop a relationship with the women's group from another denomination in your town. Invite them to join you for Bible study one or two months of the year. Listen to how their understanding of the biblical passages is the same or different from yours.

Have a discussion in your group about what specifically your church or Women of the ELCA group could do to be more receiving of the gifts of everyone who is joined to the body of Christ. Develop an action plan that will make this possible.

For your own devotions at home, read the same passage from several different Bible translations. (Start with 1 Corinthians 12:12–31.) Or use a Bible translation that is different from what you usually use for your next Bible study or your personal devotional time. Try the New Revised Standard Version, The Message, the New International Version, The Good News Version, The King James Version or other Bible translations or paraphrases people in your group might have. See if the meaning of the verses changes or if there is a new thought that you get from hearing from other Bible versions.

CLOSING

Song (Select one)

"What a Fellowship, What a Joy Divine" *ELW* 774, *WOV* 780, or *TFF* 220

"Bind Us Together" *WOV* 748 *TFF* 217

Prayer

(from "The Family of God" from *Plain Prayers in a Complicated World* by Avery Brooke)

I am alone but not alone, and I am grateful. Not only are you with me, God, but so, in spirit, are all that great company of people who try to follow you. Even living near me there are people I don't know who love you as I love you. Every time I try and fail and am forgiven and try again, I feel the unseen companionship of many other people. You have a family, God and I am a part of your family. It gives me strength and comfort to remember this, and I thank you. Amen. (Cowley Publications, 1993, p. 149)

LOOKING AHEAD

"We give thee but thine own" or "Oh, no, it's stewardship time again!" Which one best describes your feelings about the biblical concept of stewardship and how it plays out among the people of God? It can be a tender topic because it often has to do with money, which many of us find difficult to talk about. Stewardship is more than just giving money. In next month's session, we'll look at a holistic view of stewardship: the giving back to God some of what God has given us. 🌿

The Rev. Linda Johnson Seyenkulo, M.S., and **the Rev. Jensen Seyenkulo, Ph.D.,** live in the Chicago area. Linda is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Park Forest, Ill., and Jensen is director for rostered and authorized leadership in the ELCA Vocation and Education unit.

To meet the Bible study authors, visit www.lutheranwomantoday.org. There you can also view videos of the Seyenkulos talking about the sessions.

Bickering in the Body

by Nancy G. Beckwith



"I don't understand how this happened. I just want my congregation to be one, big, happy family."

During my 11 years of service on a synod staff, with primary responsibilities for working with congregations in conflict, I heard these or similar words over and over again. They were heartfelt words from confused, depressed, often tearful,

and sometimes angry congregation members. But behind the words I sensed something more—the conviction that congregations *should* be happy families, never experiencing tension and, along with that, a sense of shame and failure that *their*

congregation was in the midst of a conflict. I also heard a deep desire for peace and helplessness over how to bring about healing.

There are many people, within and outside the church, who think churches and groups within them

uch as the choir, youth group, or the women's organization) should have a special immunity from conflict. If "they'll know we are Christians by our love," then Christians should naturally express love and care for one another, be willing to work together, and, when necessary, offer boundless forgiveness. If any human institution should be free from disagreement, dissension, and tension, surely it would be Christ's church?

Any reading of the New Testament makes clear that the followers of Jesus experienced their fair share of conflict. The gospels tell of Jesus' disciples bickering over places of honor in the kingdom. Acts and Paul's letters tell of disagreements, even fights, over the mission to the Gentiles, eating meat offered to idols, spiritual gifts, the Lord's Supper, competing claims to leadership. In the centuries since New Testament times, church history has repeated the same story—just think of the disagreements that led to Luther's Reformation! Perhaps we should be more surprised by a church *without* tension.

Community and Differences

The truth is that whenever and wherever you have community you will have differences—in families, work places, towns; even in congregations, synods, and churchwide organizations. In 1 Corinthians 12

and 13, Paul uses body language to describe the church, saying that the body needs differences in order to be whole. However, he also knew that living with differences can be challenging.

People in congregations have disagreements about almost anything you can imagine: money—who has it, how it is spent; changing worship patterns—musical styles and instruments, use of technology, sacramental practices; issues around sexuality—not just homosexuality but also marriage, divorce, and singleness; church leadership—who is qualified for leadership and how leadership should be exercised; renovation and building issues; familiar or new ways of doing things; the presence or absence of youth in congregational life; reaching out to the larger world or taking care of "our own."

The most frequently experienced conflict among churches of many denominations has to do with leadership expectations and performance, especially (but not exclusively) concerning the pastor, who, as the most visible leader, is often a lightning rod for anger and frustration.

These can certainly be substantive issues. However, many conflicts seem to start with what can seem (especially to the casual observer) to be fairly minor concerns—whether to have carpet or tile in the new

kitchen, whether worship should be scheduled for 9 a.m. or 9:30, whether there should be a special youth service once a year, whether the women's organization should report to the congregation council, whether the pastor should wear jeans in the office or a clerical collar at the baseball game, whether acolytes should wear flip flops, whether the altar guild is willing to clean up after weekly communion.

Issues and Relationships

What is at the heart of even minor concerns is the nature of human relationships. Many people are uncomfortable with conflict and so, when even minor disagreements arise, there is a tendency to avoid those who have expressed or are presumed to have different opinions. The temptation is to seek out like-minded members, who will reinforce one's own perspective and give permission to ignore other perspectives. Almost without noticing it, factions form, divisions become hardened, and people on all sides come to feel unappreciated, hurt, or neglected.

Experts in conflict management often speak of levels of conflict. In low levels of conflict, even over substantive issues, the focus is on the issue not relationships. The parties are willing to cooperate, be open with one another, and stay focused on the problem. They show respect

for differing opinions and understand that disagreement is not rejection. They allow the time necessary to gather information, generate a wide range of possible solutions, and come to mutual, wise, and balanced decisions.

However, as the level of conflict escalates, so does fear and irrational behavior. The disagreement becomes a “cause,” a matter of win/lose: first wanting to win at all costs, then wanting to hurt the other, finally, at the highest level of conflict, wanting to destroy the other. Coalitions form and personal attacks

as the level of conflict escalates, so does fear and irrational behavior

take the place of problem-solving. Language becomes more emotional, even violent. People threaten to withhold their contributions or leave if they don't get their way. Fighting becomes standard operating procedure in the congregation.

Every congregation wrestles with conflict because every congregation is made up of people who differ from one another.

The word *conflict* comes from a Latin word *confligere* which means “to strike together,” an action that causes sparks. The sparks that come from living together can light

a Pentecost fire leading to a time of renewal in purpose and mission or, the sparks can fan the angry flames of meltdown. While it may be unrealistic to expect the church to be free of conflict and dissension, it should not be unrealistic to expect the body of Christ to handle conflict in ways that are profoundly influenced by the gospel.

Silence and Consent

Meltdowns occur when congregation members let their disagreements fester, are quick to blame others, attack those others by questioning their character or faithfulness, speak in generalities rather than naming specific concerns, repeat gossip and anonymous accusations, push their own positions

at the expense of the whole, attempt to enlist others in their cause.

Ignoring differences in the hope they'll go away doesn't work in the long run; it only drives those differences underground.

An expert in group dynamics once reminded me that “silence does not mean consent.” It is important for leaders actively to check out how the silent members of their group feel about possible decisions. Jesus was not passive in the face of conflict, but named differences and faced them directly. It is always easier to see the speck in someone

else's eye than the log in your own (Matthew 7:3). It is easier to make assumptions about someone else's position and motives than to do the hard work of listening and seeking to understand their concerns. It is easier to hide behind “people are saying” comments than to state your own concerns honestly and openly. It is easier to reinforce your position by speaking only with those who agree than it is to open yourself to other points of view. It is easier to call on the bishop to solve the problem to your satisfaction than to play an active role in working out a solution.

But, just as the Pentecost flame of the Holy Spirit led to the birth day of the church, the sparks of conflict, if handled well, can lead to a time of congregational rebirth. Resolving conflict is not easy. There are no magic solutions or quick fixes. It takes time and hard work but surely the well-being of the community of faith is worth our best efforts. Commit to living in the unity of Jesus Christ and trust that God will sustain, guide, and bless your effort.

Honor and Disregard

Whenever I worked with a conflicted congregation, I began by encouraging members to enter into an intensive period of prayer—for the congregation, for the pastor and other leaders, for the presence of

the Holy Spirit, and especially for those with whom they disagreed. I urged them to pray for one another *by name*, bringing to their prayers a reminder of their relationship in Jesus Christ.

My work frequently involved interviewing congregation members about their concerns. In reporting back the results of those interviews I would quote (without assigning names) what I heard, encouraging people to listen carefully to what others were saying about their own positions. Those quotes helped to make clear both the wide range of opinion and the strength of different opinions. People tended to assume that any opinion different from their own would be a minority opinion. Honoring, rather than dismissing, differences can open up new ways of looking at a problem.

Of course, there can be real and important differences between congregation members; no congregation can be all things to all people. Threatening to leave the church in an attempt to impose a particular resolution to a problem only hardens positions. Sometimes people can agree to disagree, but for some the differences may be strong enough to lead them to a new church home. Those decisions may be mourned, but should also be respected.

Establishing ground rules for working through problems is important. People need to be encouraged

to speak for themselves and not unnamed “others.” Anonymous communication has no place in the church. Remaining silent in meetings and then venting with a handful of members in the parking lot may feel satisfying, but it does nothing to help resolve the conflict.

A Hopeful Future

It's OK to challenge behavior or ideas, but it is not appropriate to question someone's motives, worth, or faith. Show respect for one another in conversation. Listen carefully. Don't interrupt. Look for common ground. Don't just be negative; rather than a long list of what's wrong, describe the changes you'd like to see, what a positive future for the congregation would look like.

Two of the hardest but most important questions for those caught up in a conflict to answer are, “How have you contributed to the conflict?” and “What can you do to help bring about a healthy future for the congregation?” It may be a struggle to come up with answers to those questions, but wrestling them can help dispel a sense of helplessness and hopelessness.

In addressing a conflict, it's important to keep the congregation's mission and goals in mind. Don't get so caught up in internal issues that you forget the world outside your windows. Look for opportunities to serve your commu-

nity. Look for accomplishments and relationships to celebrate.

One of the clearest signs of an unhealthy congregation stuck in conflict is the lack of light-hearted conversation in the gathering space or at coffee, and laughter is one of the clearest signs of restoration to health.

Although you are reading this article in October, it was written just after Pentecost. On that Sunday, the pastor of the congregation where I am a member spoke of the tower of Babel as a metaphor for the many places in our world where communication has broken down and people talk past each other without comprehending. But, he went on to say, Pentecost is a snapshot of the opposite, opening up a space that makes communication and, with opened lines of communication, reconciliation possible.

Every congregational conflict has elements of Babel and the promise of Pentecost. While it may not be comfortable, it does not have to be feared. God promises a hope that will not disappoint. 🌿

The Rev. Karen G. Bockelman is an ELCA pastor, learning what it means to be retired. She and her husband live in Duluth, Minn., when they're not out camping or watching their college-senior daughter run cross-country and track. Although life is mostly conflict-free right now, she's grateful for the lessons she's learned and can share with others.



Marj Leegard

Bold Woman and Dear Friend

by Melissa Ramirez Cooper
for the ELCA News Service

Beloved author, columnist, and speaker Marjorie “Marj” L. Leegard, Detroit Lakes, Minn., died July 12. She was 89. Leegard was a columnist for *Lutheran Woman Today* for 15 years.

A funeral service for Leegard took place on July 16 at Richwood Lutheran Church, Detroit Lakes. Leegard became a member of Richwood in 1944, after she wed Jerome Leegard there in 1942.

“Through her writing, speaking, and in conversations, Marj has

consistently invited us to live in the wonder of God’s grace,” the Rev. Mark S. Hanson, ELCA presiding bishop, wrote in a July 14 letter to Leegard’s family and friends.

“Marj has taught all of us about the beauty and challenges of life in rural America,” wrote Hanson. The Leegards lived on a beef cattle farm outside of Detroit Lakes their entire married life.

“We rejoice in Marj’s many years of writing,” said Kate Sprutta Elliott, editor, *Lutheran Woman Today*. “We

are grateful for her life and witness, which has been an inspiration to many. The readers of the magazine and Women of the ELCA staff will certainly miss her,” said Elliott.

Sue Edison-Swift initiated Leegard’s column in *Lutheran Woman Today* and served as managing editor of the magazine during most of Leegard’s tenure there. She said, “Marj was a theologians’ theologian, a chaplain to synod bishops, and a liturgical storyteller. As someone who has walked in the valley of grief and pain, her extraordinary witness of faith and hope was especially powerful.”

Leegard is survived by her husband, their son, Jerome “Jim” Jr., four grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Preceding Marj in death is daughter Laurie, who died at age 27 of cancer.

In a May 1998 article titled “Groundedness,” Marj Leegard wrote: “When we are planting vines and flowers [at Laurie’s gravesite], I mumble, ‘Why are we doing this? She is not here.’ And then I know that God created her body and gave us the gift of a daughter for earth years and for eternity. There is thankfulness in the blooms of the flowering crab apple trees. We must have a place of remembrance, and in the old cemetery we find one.” 🌸

Melissa Ramirez Cooper is associate director for news in ELCA Communication Services.

When Marj Leegard retired from writing her column for *Lutheran Woman Today* in the spring of 2009, the executive board of Women of the ELCA passed a resolution expressing gratitude for her writing ministry. An article about her ministry is available online at www.lutheranwoman.org. Go to featured articles/back issues to read the article.



WE RECOMMEND

Resources for action, advocacy, programs, or further study

Compiled from sources including the ELCA News Service, Seeds for the Parish, and www.elca.org

A brave husband, a bold wife

Lutherans and other Christians celebrate Reformation Sunday on October 31. Considered a lesser festival, it marks the day in 1517 that Martin Luther officially protested the sale of indulgences by the Roman Catholic Church in a document best known as The 95 Theses. A brave act indeed.

Why not acknowledge his equally bold wife, Katarina von Bora Luther, by learning more about her life in a Women of the ELCA online resource? Katie Luther was a wife, mother, farmer, brewmaster, innkeeper, and more. In all that she did, she acted boldly on her faith in Jesus Christ. Download the resource, *A Bold Life of Faith*, at www.womenoftheelca.org. The program is designed to take about an hour and can be used in a small group or individually.

Visit Bible sites from your computer

Are you interested in seeing where sites mentioned in the Bible are actually located on the map? The Web site Bible Geocoding features interactive maps of every identifiable place mentioned in the Bible.

Also on the site is an atlas with all the places in the Bible arranged alphabetically and about 10,000 photos.

The site uses satellite imagery and shaded relief details. Go to www.openbible.info/geo and look around.

Prayer network offers comfort, hope

Lutherans are praying for people all over the world. They are praying for sol-

diers readying for battle, families facing foreclosures, couples with relationship struggles, individuals who need work.

Through the ELCA's prayer network, thousands of prayer requests are received and prayed for each month. Is your congregation or Bible study group interested in being part of an intercessory prayer network where your prayers can affect the lives of people all over the world? If so, please join the ELCA Prayer Network and you will receive prayer concerns. Your group is simply asked to lift these prayer requests each day for one week.

Learn more or join the network by visiting www.elca.org/prayer.

Your congregation's records have a life cycle

You create and maintain the records of your congregation to have the information you need when you need it. Today, most of the records of your life together as a congregation begin as digital files. Your financial records and parish register may be kept in a database. Meeting minutes, reports, newsletters, sermons, and other documents are created using word processing software. Correspondence is usually by e-mail.

The ELCA provides guidelines that can help assure that these records will be available in the future long after hardware, software, and file formats have changed.

For more information, go to www.elca.org/records and download documents that can help you secure future records for your congregation.

Economic Life By Kaari Reiersen

- THE CHURCH CONFESSES
- OUR OBLIGATION AND ONGOING TENSIONS
- FOR ALL: ESPECIALLY THOSE LIVING IN POVERTY
- LIVELIHOOD: VOCATION, WORK, AND HUMAN DIGNITY
- SUFFICIENCY: ENOUGH, BUT NOT TOO MUCH
- SUSTAINABILITY: OF THE ENVIRONMENT, AGRICULTURE, AND LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES
- IN CONCLUSION, A VISION RENEWED

This ELCA social statement and accompanying study guide are available for free download at www.elca.org/socialstatements. You can order a free printed copy online at that address or by calling 800-638-3522, ext. 2996.

The late 1990s was marked by great attention to changes and growing inequities in the global economic order. *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, the ELCA social statement on economic life adopted at the 1999 Churchwide Assembly, begins by describing the extensive influence that economics have on our lives. Human beings are responsible for economic life, but people often feel powerless in the face of it. The influence of economic practices in our day can feel god-like in how it controls us.

These dynamics raise the central theological questions that this social statement addresses:

- In what or whom do we place our trust?
- How are certain economic assumptions in tension with what we as a church confess?
- How is Christian identity, freedom, and hope rooted in Jesus Christ, rather than in economic success or failure?
- What is the relationship between God's reign of justice and the injustices we face in economic life?

Economic life is intended to be a means through which God's purposes for humankind and creation are to be served (page 2). When this does not happen, we are called to seek changes in economic life in light of the biblically grounded imperative of "sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all."

The terms are defined on the third page of the social statement: the scope of God's concern (for all), the means by which life is sustained (livelihood), what is needed (sufficiency), and a long-term perspective (sustainability). The statement recognizes that many things in our economic system place us in tension with those priorities.

For all: especially those living in poverty

For all refers to all people and creation. The power of God's suffering, self-giving love transforms and challenges the church to stand with all who are overlooked for the sake of economic progress or greed—especially those who live in poverty. Outrage over the plight of people living in poverty is a theme throughout the Bible. Martin Luther interprets the commandments in such a way that calls us to ensure we do not allow our greed to prevent our neighbors from having enough.

This social statement renews our commitment to find creative, multi-faceted ways of addressing poverty. Changes are needed in policies and practices of trade, investment, government spending and accountability, and international debt so that the poorest will benefit.

Livelihood: vocation, work, dignity

Livelihood highlights themes of vocation, work, and human dignity. Our livelihoods are the ways we are supported economically—not just our jobs, but our networks (such as family, neighborhood, and church). Our vocation is to seek what is good for people and creation in ways that glorify God and anticipate God's promised future.

Work is the means of sustaining humans and creation. In our shifting job market, our faith reminds us that "our security and livelihood rest ultimately on God." Through our work we should be able to express ourselves and be treated in ways consistent with our God-given dignity. This dignity should be reflected in hiring, compensation, and worker rights practices to which this church commits itself and calls other employers to do. Income should be raised to move low-paid workers out of poverty.

Sufficiency: enough, but not too much

Sufficiency deals with the sharp contrast between those who do not have enough and those who have too much. This social statement commits us to respond to and address why so many in our midst continue to live in poverty. God calls us to a life of mutual generosity toward all who are our neighbors. Government also is expected to promote the common good and assist those unable to provide for their livelihood.

Many of us have far more than we need and fall into bondage to what we have. Endless accumulation becomes an end in itself; we have confused our wants for our needs. Enormous differences in income and wealth threaten our integrity. Large transnational corporations grow in financial power and influence. These disparities need to be lessened and corporate interests held more accountable to the whole human community.

Sustainability: of the environment, agriculture, and low-income communities

Sustainability calls for efforts to ensure that natural and social systems will survive and thrive together over the long term. We must consider the effects of economic activity on nature and people.

Environmental sustainability requires policies that help reverse ecological destruction. Sustaining agriculture involves addressing farmers' high risk levels, low prices, and the small proportion of the retail food dollar they typically receive.

Sustainable development of low-income communities focuses on the communities' assets, the health and welfare of the residents, and on their plans for the future. Investments should sustain not only businesses but also communities and the environment.

A vision renewed

The statement concludes by acknowledging that the church is a participant in the economic system and, as such, falls short of perfection. In the face of our weariness in pursuit of "sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all," we hear the word and receive the sacraments. What we receive does sustain us. We are strengthened to continue the struggle for justice and a more equitable economic order by the vision of the coming of God's kingdom. We bear witness to God's intentions for creation. 🌿

The Rev. Kaari Reiersen is associate director for studies, ELCA Church in Society.



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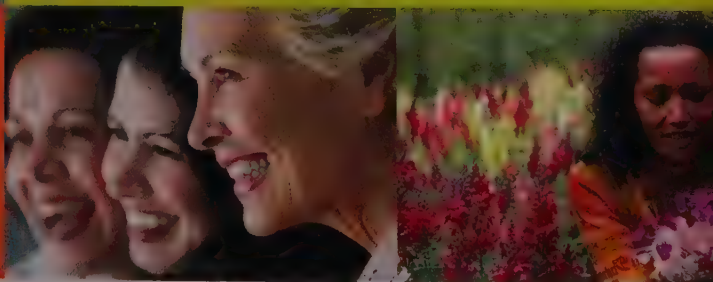
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RACE NOTES

All Good Gifts

by Linda Post Bushkofsky



I love to give and get

gifts. In giving, there's the fun search for matching the gift with the recipient. I like to wrap the gift in a special way too. On the receiving end, I feel loved and appreciated when someone gives me a gift.

The reality is, even for the younger ones on my gift lists, we really don't need anything. We have the basics—and more. When we need something, we buy it. As birthdays and holidays have come around lately, my husband and I have looked for other ways to remember the day through a gift. You can too.

Earlier this year our godson affirmed his faith in confirmation. In addition to a modest gift card, we made a gift in our godson's name for an ELCA missionary sponsorship. We selected a country from which came many of our godson's ancestors. The missionary and his wife happen to have sons about the same age as our godson. Periodically our godson receives an e-mail from the mission family, learning about their lives and work.

We also set up a MissionFuture4Kidz account (through the Mission Investment Fund) for our godson, and we place money in it for special events and holidays. He knows that this investment helps grow our church, providing loans for new buildings and renovations.

Last Christmas I heard from Joyce Opjorden, former churchwide secretary of Women of the ELCA. She regularly meets with three other women, all of whom had served together in their synodical organization. They used to exchange gifts at Christmas, but last

year they decided to pool their money and purchased an animal through God's Global Barnyard in the ELCA Good Gifts catalog. They made the gift through Women of the ELCA, so the churchwide organization was credited with the gift.

Our children don't need another toy that will break too soon. Our friends don't need another box of chocolates. But people around the world do need clean water, netting to protect themselves from malaria-carrying mosquitoes, school uniforms, and education.

As you prepare for Christmas this year, won't you consider making a gift that has an impact on the mission and ministry of our church? Match the gift to the person in whose name you are making the gift. For a bold woman, make a gift to Katie's Fund. Or, if your grandchild is raising a goat through 4H, why not give a gift of a goat through the ELCA Good Gifts catalog in your grandchild's name? Call 800-638-3522 to learn more about Katie's Fund or to request an ELCA Good Gifts catalog.

When women give to ELCA designated ministries, they support the ELCA's efforts to go where we cannot. All gifts to Women of the ELCA that are designated for an ELCA ministry will be forwarded in total to that ministry. Making your contribution for an ELCA Good Gift or a missionary sponsorship through Women of the ELCA acknowledges and honors how women support the ministries of the whole church. 🌿

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.



AMEN!

Looking Into the Center

by Catherine Malotky

Today, I begin with a breath, deep and full. Somehow, my breath can find my center, that place where I am least protected, not dressed up for public display, not on guard lest someone make a judgment. This space in me I long to fill with the Spirit, to find a welcome there . . . and safety.

For most of us, this is a place of shadow, perhaps even unknown. Many voices have shaped this space. Others have entered and left baggage behind. Here, the wounds of a lifetime are stored, wounds that have left us to some degree without stable footing, and painfully, without a clear vision of who inhabits this center. The shadow hides many things.

- A small child who fears punishment if she disappoints powerful others.
- A young girl who sees her body as an embarrassment, clumsy and unshapely.
- A young woman who wonders whether she can really do this job well enough to make others proud.
- A middle-aged woman whose competence is overshadowed by her graying hair.
- A well-seasoned woman who wonders whether she has any value as she declines physically.

We carry the likes of these within us, the shadows of the lives we have lived, the places where we did not heal. We work hard to keep these insecurities in the shadows, for they do not make us shine. We will work hard to keep them hidden, to outpace and ignore them.

And it is this hiding that makes us fragile, insecure, and defensive. Our efforts to protect ourselves lead us to seek relationships that do not draw us out, that require little, but don't rattle us so we can keep our bearings.

These shadows are not our enemies. They are not an embarrassment, or shameful, or a sign of weakness. For all of us they are the legacy of living.

They invite our attention and care for we would not be who we are without them. They are, in some ways, our children, who need our tending and nurture. They have much to teach us, these shadows. And as we heal, they can make us sturdy and strong. If we are willing to look, they can give us a clearer vision of the one in us God calls into service.

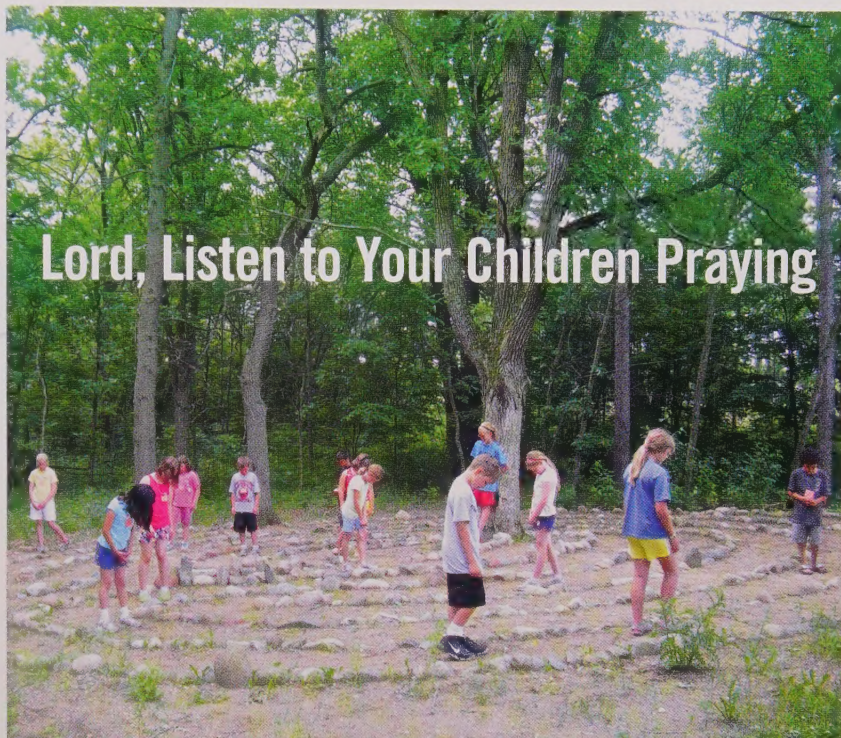
If we choose to live as ones who are healing, we can begin to see the limits of harmony at all cost. We can begin to see the danger of stagnation in steady doses of the familiar. Instead, we can begin to welcome diversity. Our world can become richer, wider, varied . . . more reflective of God's unlimited imagination.

From this place of healing, we will be broader, more full. Because in that center place, the place where the shadows of our living remain, we will also meet Jesus, arms are held wide in welcome. We breathe the Spirit, who heals and nourishes, bathing our shadows in light and life. Amen. 🌿

The Rev. Catherine Malotky serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as retirement planning manager. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.

Faith Lutheran Church, Staples, Minn., was about to begin its annual vacation Bible school with an emphasis on prayer when the July/August issue of *Lutheran Woman Today* arrived. "When I looked at the magazine, I felt the blessing of the Holy Spirit in our plans!" wrote Joyce Anderson, director of youth and families for the church. "Almost all the prayer methods and experiences we had planned to introduce and use as VBS curriculum were described in the magazine. With that sense of enthusiasm, we entered an intense four days of prayer and play." Anderson said 68 children, from age 4 through 5th grade, along with 24 middle and high school students attended VBS.

In the photo, the children are walking the church's labyrinth, built over three years with rocks brought from their homes.



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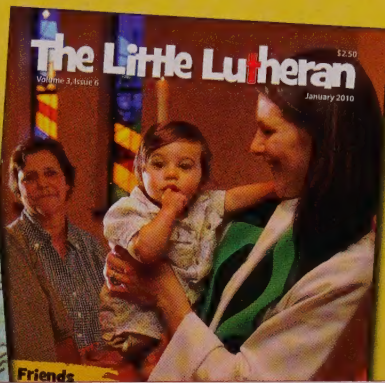
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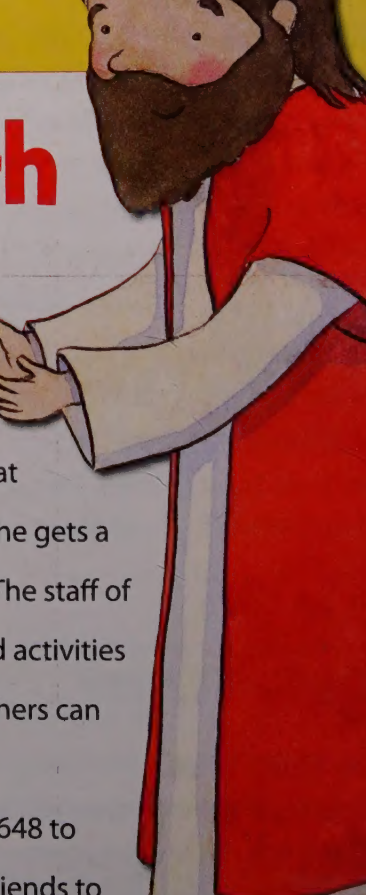
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